

# PORTRAITS OF ROBERT WILLAN

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NEW HAVEN, CONN.

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## PORTRAITS OF ROBERT WILLAN \*

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NEW HAVEN, CONN.

I became so interested in Willan's personality while searching for material for a sketch of his life that for a dozen years I did not entirely abandon the hope of discovering his portrait. An account of the unsuccessful period of the search has been given in the previously published account of his life.<sup>1</sup>

That my search has been brought to a successful conclusion, and that I am now able to present copies of portraits of Robert Willan with some additional information about him, is due to the kindness and exertions of Dr. Robert Joseph Willan, F.R.C.S., of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. I was not acquainted with him, but his name, his profession and the fact that he lives not far from Robert Willan's birthplace led me to appeal to him in the hope that he might be able and willing to assist me in my search. His response was most cordial.

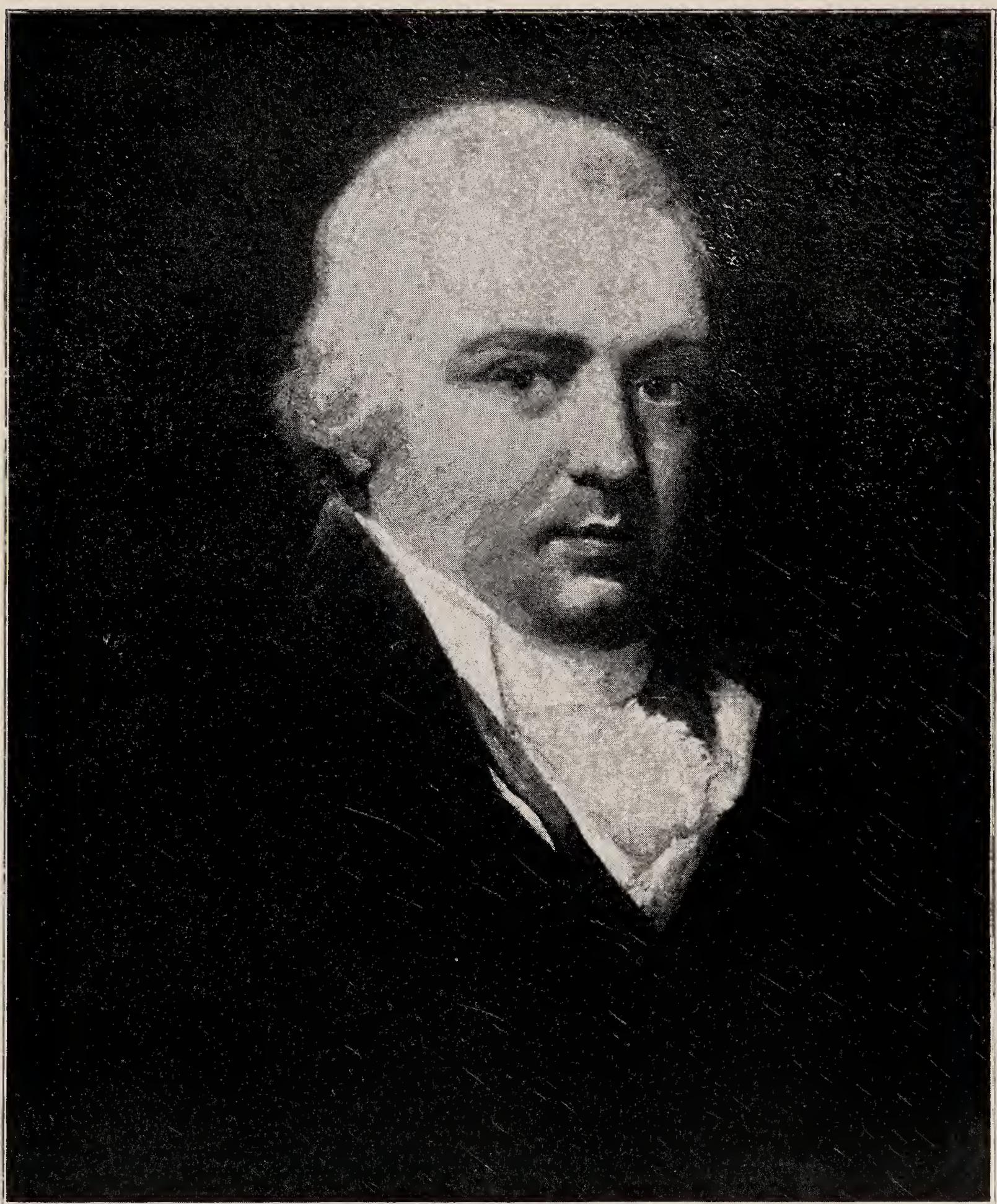
He found that there is an oil painting of Willan at the Sedbergh School, where Willan had his early education, and that the portrait was given to the school in 1927 by Miss Mary E. C. Howell, of London, Willan's great granddaughter. He also found that the "Piece of Plate" presented to Willan on his retirement as physician to the Public Dispensary had been previously presented to the school by the late Mrs. Howell. He made a special journey to Sedbergh and obtained and sent to me a photograph of the painting and the permission to publish it. He obtained from Miss Howell and sent to me a copy of the inscription on the piece of plate,<sup>2</sup> and he found other smaller portraits of Willan in her possession. He also assisted me in communicating with Miss Howell and with Rev. A. J. K. Martyn, headmaster of the Sedbergh School, in my search for further information.

*The Sedberghian*, the Sedbergh School periodical, describes the portrait at the school as that of "a capable, resolute man in the prime of life, dressed in the high cravat and blue coat of the Regency," and says that "some interest in the picture has been aroused by alleged traces of Romney's brush."<sup>3</sup>

1. Lane, J. E.: Robert Willan, Arch. Dermat. & Syph. **13**:737 (June) 1926.

2. The inscription on the piece of plate is as follows: Viro integerrimo artis scientiaeque suae peritissimo Robert Willan, M.D., ob felicissimam operam in morbis egenorum civium sanandis Viginti annos amplius gratuito et strenue navatam aegrotantium apud Londinensis Pauperum Patroni Amico amici L.L.D., D.D., A. D. MDCCCLIII, Societatis Praeside Comite sandvicense Collatae pecuniae custode Gulielmo Waddington.

3. A Very Distinguished Old Serberghian, *The Sedberghian* **48**:120 (June) 1927.



Robert Willan, from painting at the Sedbergh School, Sedbergh, England.

"The Rev. Mr. Martyn *thinks* it more than possible that it was painted by Romney, for both Romney and Willan at some time lived in the neighboring town of Kendal in Westmoreland." <sup>4</sup>

Miss Howell furnished the following information in regard to Willan and his family, for which I had previously searched in vain:

"Dr. Willan was buried in Madeira, I *think* at Funchal—that is where they landed (after a tedious voyage of 53 days from Blackwall!). He gave particular directions a few days before his death that 'his remains should not be removed to England for interment.' I have no proof of this but it is especially mentioned in a letter from Dr. Ashby

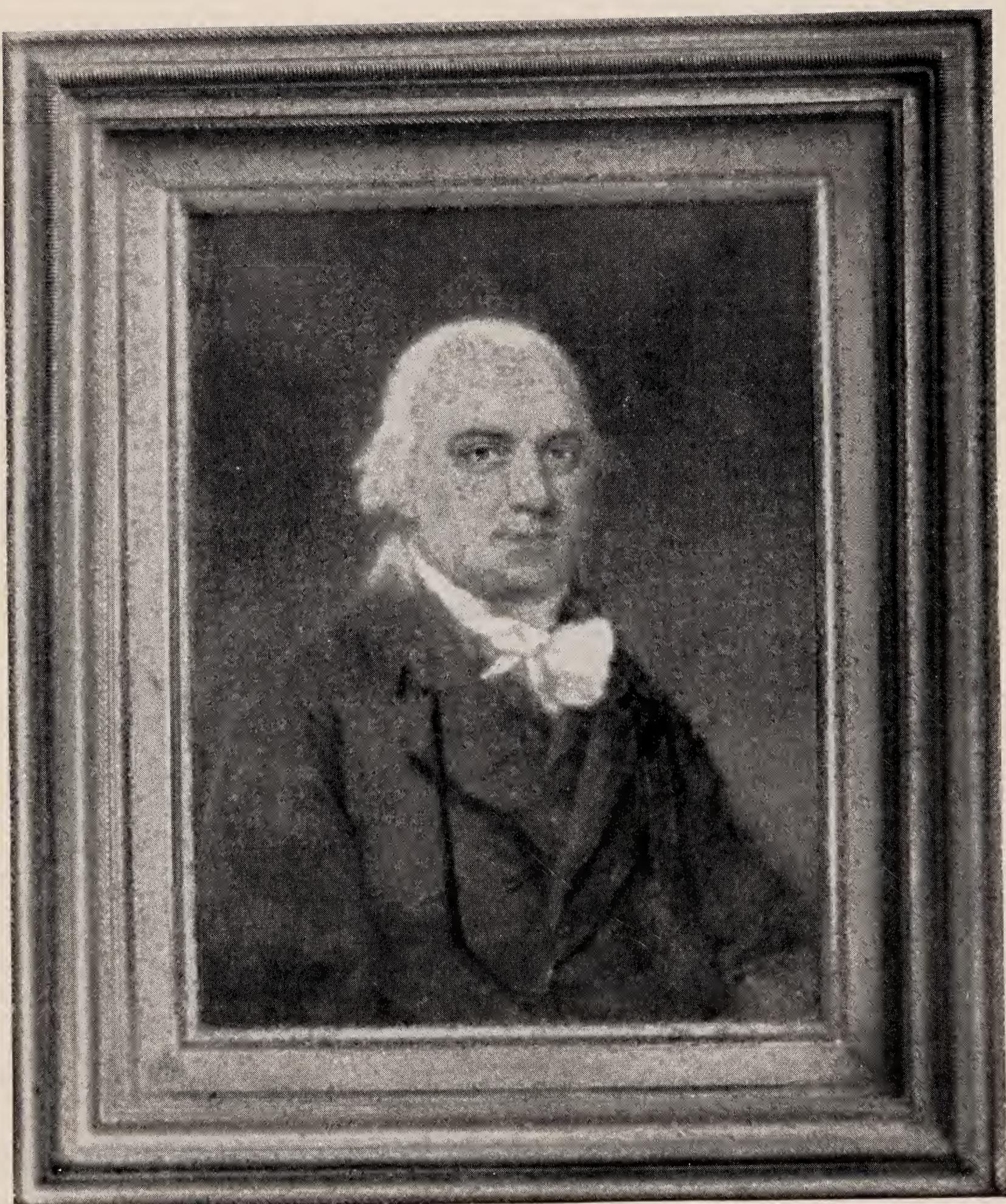


Robert and Mary Willan, from the miniatures in the possession of Miss Mary E. C. Howell, London.

Smith to Dr. Willan's brother Richard, written on April 14 to announce the death having taken place on April 7 and adding 'the funeral is intended to take place tomorrow.' Dr. Willan married Mary, widow of Dr. Scott, her maiden name 'De Beaufre.' Their only child *Richard Willan*, my grandfather, had one only son *Robert* who died a bachelor in 1902. I am the only descendant of Dr. Willan, my mother having been *Mary*, sister of *Robert*, whose other three sisters left no descendants; so far as I know I have no Willan relations even in a remote degree.

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4. Willan, R. J.: Personal communication to the author, Nov. 26, 1928.



Robert Willan, from the painting in the possession of Miss Mary E. C. Howell,  
London.

"It may interest you to know that Dr. Ashby Smith married Mary Scott, one of Mrs. Willan's daughters by her first husband, the other sister died unmarried, and there are no descendants of the Ashby Smiths.

"The Fothergill medal was, alas, stolen years ago. Mrs. Willan survived her husband some years and their son died in 1847.<sup>5</sup>

"There is a monument in memory of Willan, probably erected by his widow, in the church yard at Hillington, Middlesex."<sup>6</sup>

The Sedbergh School Register says of Willan: "He was a model of the perfect human character; the best and noblest of mankind."<sup>7</sup> The author of these entries is unknown.

NOTE.—Miss Howell has presented to the Royal College of Physicians two letters from Robert Willan to his brother. Before doing so, she sent them to me, and I have presented a photostatic copy of each to the Library of the New York Academy of Medicine and to the Yale University Library.

To Dr. Robert Joseph Willan I express my thanks for his careful and time-consuming search; to Miss Howell, for photographs of the painting and of the miniatures of Willan and his wife still in her possession, for permission to reproduce them and for her kindness in furnishing interesting information in regard to Willan; to Rev. Mr. Martyn, for information furnished me through Dr. Willan, for permission to reproduce the portrait in possession of the school and for local photographs of interest.

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5. Howell, M. E. C.: Personal communication to the author, Jan. 9, 1929.

6. Howell, M. E. C.: Personal communication to the author, Jan. 31, 1929.

7. The Sedbergh School Register, 1546-1895, Leeds, Richard Jackson, p. 156.







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